

International Journal of Legal Information

the Official Journal of the International Association of Law Libraries

Volume 35
Issue 3 *Winter 2007*

Article 7

1-1-2007

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The *International Journal of Legal Information* is produced by The International Association of Law Libraries.

Recommended Citation

Miguel, Teresa M. (2007) "Exchanging Books in Western Europe: A Brief History of International Interlibrary Loan," *International Journal of Legal Information*: Vol. 35: Iss. 3, Article 7.

Available at: <http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/ijli/vol35/iss3/7>

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Exchanging Books in Western Europe: A Brief History of International Interlibrary Loan

TERESA M. MIGUEL *

I. Lending Practices during the Early Middle and Middle Ages

Interlibrary Loan is not a new concept. The practice of lending and borrowing materials occurred as far back as the 8th century in Western Europe.¹ An 8th century copy of St. Augustine's *De Trinitate* in the Bodleian Library contains a page originally left blank at the end of the manuscript whereupon "an Anglo-Saxon hand of about the year 800 entered a small list of books."² Elias A. Lowe's translation and analysis of this list and adjacent annotations demonstrates that the list was likely a "catalog" of manuscripts in the ancient library of St. Kilian's at Würzburg,³ and that several books were loaned to Holzkirchen and to the monastery at Fulda. The three institutions were geographically close, with Holz church being a dependency of Fulda monastery.⁴ Fulda's library was the largest in Germany except, possibly, for St. Gall.⁵

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¹ Elias A. Lowe, *An Eight-Century List of Books in a Bodleian MS. from Würzburg and its Probable Relation to the Laudian Acts*, 3 *Speculum* 3, 5 (1928) (a fascinating analysis of notations in an 8th c. manuscript, with photocopies of the relevant manuscript page); *see also*, Lester Condit, *Bibliography in its Prenatal Existence*, 7 *Library Quarterly* 564, 567 (1937) *citing* Lowe, *supra*; Lois C. Gilmer, *Interlibrary Loan: Theory and Management* 1 (1994) *citing* Condit, *supra*.

² Lowe, *supra* note 1, at 4.

³ *Id.* at 12.

⁴ *Id.* at 10-11.

⁵ George H. Putnam, *Books and their Makers during the Middle Ages*, Vol.I 134 (New York, Knickerbocker Press, 1896).



Augustine of Hippo⁶

During the Middle Ages, monasteries were renowned for their manuscript collections: *Clastrum sine armario, castrum sine armamentario* ("A monastery without a library is like a castle without an armory").⁷ Extensive borrowing and lending occurred among monasteries and convents during this time and thousands of monks and nuns across Christian Europe transcribed continually. Books exceedingly outnumbered the relatively small number of scholars and readers who desired them.⁸ The rising demand for manuscripts led to an increase in production. In turn, catalogs became more common and more complex. The first known formal, alphabetical catalog in Western Europe was created in the 12th century.⁹

⁶ Wikipedia Commons, St. Augustine reproduction, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo (last visited Feb. 29, 2008).

⁷ Putnam, *supra* note 5, at 133, *quoting* an 1170 A.D. letter from Geoffrey, sub-prior of S. Barbe, Normandy, France, to Peter Mangot, monk of Baugercy, in the diocese of Tours, France.

⁸ *Id.* at 135.

⁹ Condit, *supra* note 1, at 572.

There was also a significant book exchange (i.e. lending and borrowing) occurring in the Islamic world during the Middle Ages, specifically between Cordoba, Spain and Baghdad. Until the Christian reconquest of Cordoba in 1236, Cordoba was the intellectual and political capital of the Moorish kingdom. By the end of the 10th c., Cordoba had a population of about 1 million people (today 325,000) and was the home to a leading university, an important library (with a reported, but probably exaggerated, 400,000 volumes), and the chief of the Moorish scribes, who had moved from Baghdad to Cordoba under employment of the Khalif in Cordoba.¹⁰

In the Christian world, as borrowing and lending activity increased, it also became more controlled. Not all monasteries, however, were willing to part with their manuscripts regardless of the widely held belief that loaning books was a highly meritorious act of mercy. In fact, some monasteries altogether prohibited the borrowing and lending of books under pain of excommunication. This policy was formally condemned in 1212 by the Council of Paris, who encouraged monks to establish a separate collection of books within the monastery for loan to members of their communities. This was considered an important showing of mercy to the poor.¹¹

In 1471, King Louis XI of France was required to deposit a significant monetary pledge as well as a pledge of a nobleman as surety in a deed in order to borrow the works of Rasis (the Arabian physician) from the Faculty of Medicine in Paris.¹²

II. Success and Failure during the Renaissance

Libraries in Italy, France, and England flourished during the Renaissance. The Vatican Library of the Roman Catholic Church (founded in 1447) contained many important manuscripts and books. The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris became a depository of all books published in France per the 1536 decree of King Francis I. Many scholars sought to borrow manuscripts from these libraries and, thus, a very informal practice of international interlibrary loan developed amongst scholars and librarians who were willing to share their treasures.¹³

¹⁰ Putnam, *supra* note 5, at 253-254.

¹¹ *Id.* at 138.

¹² *Id.* at 136, citing Gabriel Naudé, *Addit a l'Histoire de Lowys XI*, par Comines, edit. de Fresnoy.

¹³ Gilmer, *supra* note 1, at 1.

A century later, in 1627, Gabriel Naudé¹⁴ published *Advice on Establishing a Library* wherein he described the usefulness of his catalog:

By this means [a catalog] one may sometimes serve and please a friend, when one cannot provide him the book he requires, by directing him to the place where he may find a copy, as may easily be done with the assistance of the catalogues.¹⁵

The practice of creating individual library catalogs lead to the ease in locating and borrowing books and manuscripts from other libraries.



Gabriel Naudé¹⁶

During the same time period, a friend of Naudé, Frenchman Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637), attempted to create an interlibrary loan

¹⁴ Naudé studied medicine in Paris and Padua, but moved to Rome in 1629 to be the librarian to Cardinal Bagni and then to Cardinal Barberini. While librarian for Cardinal Richelieu in Paris, he earned the honorary title of personal physician to Louis XIII. In 1643, he became librarian to Cardinal Mazarin, for whom he amassed over 40,000 books from across Europe, thus making it one of the best libraries of its time. Enciclopedia Británica Online, Gabriel Naude, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9055054/Gabriel-Naude> (last visited Aug. 3, 2007).

¹⁵ Gabriel Naudé, *Advice on Establishing a Library* 12. (University of California Press 1950) (1627).

¹⁶ Wikipedia Commons, Naudé reproduction, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel_Naud%C3%A9 (last visited Feb. 29, 2008).

system between the Royal Library in Paris and the Vatican and Barberini libraries in Rome.¹⁷ Peiresc was Jesuit-trained and educated in the law, was a member of Parliament in Provence, France (he took over his family's seat), and was a friend and colleague to most of the important Renaissance figures, including Galilee Galileo, Hugo Grotius, Peter-Paul Rubens, and the Medici family. Peiresc himself was one of the most influential and well-known men in Europe during his lifetime, but was quickly forgotten after his death.¹⁸ Through his travels, work, and scholarly activities, Peiresc often played the role of intermediary between foreign scholars who wished to borrow materials, even original manuscripts, from various libraries around Europe. He was often called upon to obtain materials from abroad and also to make introductions between scholars.¹⁹



Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc²⁰

¹⁷ Francis W. Gravit, *A proposed interlibrary loan system in the seventeenth century*, 16 *Library Quarterly* 331 (1946); Gilmer, *supra* note 1, at 1.

¹⁸ Peter N. Miller, *Peiresc's Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century* 1 (2000).

¹⁹ Gravit, *supra* note 17, at 331.

²⁰ Wikipedia Commons, Peiresc reproduction, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Nicholas-Claude_Fabri_de_Peiresc.jpg (last visited Feb. 29, 2008).

In 1630, Peiresc met and became professionally acquainted with the young French librarian Jean-Jacques Bouchard (1606 – 1641), in Aix-en-Provence on Bouchard's way to Rome. While in Aix-en-Provence Bouchard became tangled in a scandalous affair with a chambermaid. Despite a slightly tarnished reputation, Bouchard left for Rome with high recommendations from Nicolas Rigault, librarian at the Royal Library in Paris, and Peiresc.²¹ Rigault recommended Bouchard as someone who was very well versed in the great works of literature, knew several languages (Greek, Latin, Italian and his native French), had very good morals, and was a great conversationalist due to his ingenuity and candor.²²

Bouchard arrived in Rome with specific recommendations from Peiresc to Cardinals Barberini and Bentivoglio, and Lucas Holstenius, who later became the Vatican librarian.²³ Bouchard was ultimately offered work in the library of Cardinal Barberini, the nephew of the Pope, and became a new library contact for Peiresc in Italy.²⁴



Cardinal Francesco Barberini²⁵

²¹ *Id.*; see also, Letter from Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc (Nov. 18, 1630), in *Lettres de Peiresc*, Vol. II 260 (Phillipe Tamiey de Larroque ed., (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1888-1898).

²² Gravit, *supra* note 17, at 332, citing Nicolas Rigault, in *Bibliothèque Nationale*, MS fr. 9544, fol. 19 (1630) (my translation).

²³ Gravit, *supra* note 17; *Lettres de Peiresc*, Vol. II, *supra* note 21.

²⁴ Gravit, *supra* note 17, at 331-332.

²⁵ Agnès Bresson, Barberini reproduction, <http://www.peiresc.org/Corresp.html> (last visited Feb. 29, 2008).

Several years later, Bouchard began to work on the translation of Christian chronicles containing works by Georgius Syncellus for Cardinal Barberini. Bouchard initially utilized a copy of the Georgius Syncellus manuscript in his library but Cardinal Barberini believed that the original manuscript in the Royal Library in Paris was more complete.²⁶ Bouchard and Cardinal Barberini proposed a copy of the original manuscript be made. However, it was soon discovered that the original manuscript in Paris was very difficult to read and that it would be difficult to find a competent copyist. Thus, by the end of 1634 Bouchard and Cardinal Barberini realized that Bouchard required the original Georgius Syncellus manuscript from the Royal Library in Paris. Naturally, Bouchard asked Peiresc to negotiate the loan of the Georgius Syncellus manuscript for him.²⁷

On New Year's Eve 1634, Peiresc wrote to Bouchard suggesting that Bouchard offer the original Libanius manuscript in exchange for the Georgius Syncellus manuscript. Peiresc made this suggesting knowing that his colleague required the Libanius manuscript for a volume he was preparing.²⁸ This was the beginning of Peiresc's fervent efforts, as evidenced by the many letters exchanged between Bouchard and Peiresc, to convince the Royal librarians to agree to the temporary exchange.²⁹

Peiresc realized that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a system of borrowing and lending between Paris and Rome, which until now would have been inconceivable due to jealousy among the Parisian scholars and internal obstacles within the Roman libraries. Peiresc knew that if he could achieve such a system, he would be directly responsible for increasing scholarly work as a result of increasing access to materials. Peiresc had always thought ill of those who guarded their manuscripts from the public and saw this as the opportune moment in history that could change this custom.³⁰

²⁶ *Id.* at 332; Letter from Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc to Jacques Dupuy (Mar. 14, 1634), in *Lettres de Peiresc*, Vol. III 55-56 (Phillipe Tamiey de Larroque ed., (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1888-1898).

²⁷ Gravit, *supra* note 17, at 332.

²⁸ *Id.*; Letter from Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc to Nicolas Rigault (Dec. 31, 1634), in *Lettres de Peiresc*, Vol. IV 127 (Phillipe Tamiey de Larroque ed., (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1888-1898).

²⁹ Gravit, *supra* note 17, at 332-333.

³⁰ *Id.*

Bouchard and Cardinal Barberini did everything they could to assist Peiresc. Cardinal Barberini personally promised that the Parisian manuscript would be secure and that it would be “scrupulously” referenced in Bouchard’s final product. Additionally, Cardinal Barberini offered that anytime the Royal Library in Paris needed a manuscript in the future from the Vatican library, the Royal Library’s request would be granted.³¹

In January 1635, Peiresc presented the offer to Rigault and to Jacques Auguste de Thou, the head librarian of the Royal Library in Paris.



Nicolas Rigault



Jacques Auguste de Thou³²

The next day Peiresc presented the same proposal to Pierre and Jacques Dupuy, friends of Peiresc and intellectual leaders in Paris, convincing them of the importance of gaining access to the Vatican library. Although either Rigault or Jacques Dupuy (who was not on good terms with Bouchard possibly for failure to secure a document) pleaded Peiresc’s case to the office of the Chancellor, it was ultimately denied due to a recently-established policy in France against allowing the transport of manuscripts.

³¹ *Id.*; see also, *Lettres de Peiresc*, Vol II 315 and 431-432, *supra* note 21.

³² Agnès Bresson, Rigault and de Thou reproductions, <http://www.peiresc.org/Corresp.html> (last visited Feb. 29, 2008).



Pierre and Jacques Dupuy³³

Peiresc related this bad news to Bouchard and Cardinal Barberini on January 31, 1635.³⁴ Thus, disappointingly, in the course of little more than a month, Peiresc's first attempt at a formalized international interlibrary loan system ended as quickly as it began.³⁵

III. Modern Developments in International Lending

It was not until about 200 years after Peiresc that evidence of formalized international interlibrary lending began to appear again. In fact, prior to the late 19th century, many libraries would not even loan materials to their own patrons. For example, the Spanish Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, established in 1711 by King Felipe V, was prohibited by law (orden de 10 de mayo de 1873) of allowing its patrons to take library materials home, much less of loaning materials internationally.³⁶

³³ Agnès Bresson Dupuy reproduction, <http://www.peiresc.org/Corresp.html> (last visited Feb. 29, 2008).

³⁴ Gravit, *supra* note 17, at 333-334; Letter from Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc to Bouchard (Dec. 31, 1635), in *Lettres de Peiresc* Vol. IV, *supra* note 28.

³⁵ Another year passed before a legible copy of the Georgius Syncellus manuscript was made and shipped to Rome. Bouchard never published his translation, perhaps due to the delay. Eventually, Cardinal Barberini commissioned the translation of the Georgius manuscript in Paris, where it was finally completed in 1652 (Gravit, *supra* note 17, at 334).

³⁶ Vicente G. Quesada, *Las Bibliotecas Europeas y Algunas de la América Latina* 440 (Buenos Aires, Imprenta y Librería de Mayo, 1877). Interestingly, library users were not permitted to read modern works of purely entertainment value unless the book was the subject of or related to serious scholarly study (Artículo 94 del

In the United States in 1876, Samuel Green, library director of the Worcester (Mass.) public library, suggested a formalized system for interlibrary lending for public libraries in the U.S. pointing to Europe as an example:

...in many places [in Europe] it is easy to get through the local library books belonging to libraries in distant countries. If I am correctly informed, valuable books and even manuscripts are thus sent from one library to another to a very considerable extent.”³⁷

In a revolutionarily move in 1883, the Austrian government declared that local libraries could lend to foreign libraries without explicit permission from the central government. Many countries followed suit.³⁸ Finally, in the early 1900s, the United States Library of Congress, established in 1800 by the U.S. Congress, began to engage in interlibrary loan with the national libraries of foreign countries.³⁹

Before World War I most European countries were practicing some sort of international interlibrary loan. According to Frederick C. Hicks, then Assistant Librarian at Columbia University, libraries in Europe were borrowing and lending thousands of volumes. Records from the Royal Library of Berlin showed that during the previous 7 years, international lending varied from 6,500 to 12,500 loans, annually.⁴⁰

Although the European practice of international lending stopped during the war, after the war ended Germany and England aggressively revitalized interlibrary loan among European countries as both Germany and England had retained their union catalogs through which all requests for materials were made.⁴¹ Inter-continental interlibrary loan was also increasing rapidly. In 1926, the Library of Congress loaned 2,964 volumes to libraries

Reglamento de 1857). This particular prohibition also existed in central libraries in Paris, Berlin, Munich, and Brussels. *Id.* at 441.

³⁷ Samuel Green, *The Lending of Books to One Another by Libraries*, 1 Library Journal 15, 16 (1876).

³⁸ Gilmer, *supra* note 1, at 6.

³⁹ *Id.* at 1. Interlibrary loan within the United States was the subject of much controversy and interesting debate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but is beyond the scope of this article.

⁴⁰ Frederick C. Hicks, *Inter-library Loans*, 38 Library Journal 67, 67 (1913).

⁴¹ Gilmer, *supra* note 1, at 6.

outside Washington, D.C., including to Canada, Germany, Italy, and Norway.⁴²

The increased international lending practice led to the creation of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) in 1927 and by 1928 many countries in Europe were once again engaged in the practice of interlibrary loan either formally or informally. “The Bureau of Information in Berlin seems to be an efficient institution. Scandinavia, Italy, France have developed their systems, the best of all these being their liberality.”⁴³

According to A.G. Drachmann, Assistant Librarian at the University Library in Copenhagen, many European countries were utilizing international interlibrary loan after World War I. Between 1918 and 1928, Denmark’s Royal Library borrowed books and manuscripts from 86 different libraries from outside of Denmark, and they loaned 1321 books and manuscripts to libraries outside of Denmark.⁴⁴

Not all countries, however, were quick to established easily accessible means for borrowing and lending materials. For example, in order to borrow a book from France during this time, the requesting Danish library had to write to the Ministry of Education, who then wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Danish Legation also had to write to the French Foreign Office, who then sent the request to the Bibliothèque Nationale. The book was then sent to each office until it finally reached the Danish library who requested it. “A Danish professor once wanted a manuscript sent from Paris. It took nine months, and cost him some \$12. The librarian returned it direct – cost 50 cents.”⁴⁵ Other countries, such as England, had yet to establish a formal system of interlibrary loan although informal loans were made frequently (Powell, 1928).⁴⁶

⁴² American Library Association, *A survey of libraries in the United States*, Vol. II 222 (1926).

⁴³ M.O. Young, *Theory and Practice of Interlibrary Loans in American Libraries*, in *Selected Articles on Interlibrary Loans* 13, 16 (1928).

⁴⁴ Aage G. Drachmann, *Interlibrary Loans in Continental Europe*, in *Selected Articles on Interlibrary Loans* 32, 34 (1928).

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 37.

⁴⁶ Walter Powell, *Interlibrary loans in Great Britain*, in *Selected Articles on Interlibrary Loans* 25, 25 (1928). In 1759, the British Museum opened under the auspices of providing free access to its library. However, due to the formalities required of patrons to gain access combined with the Museum’s emphasis on its natural history collection, a true library was unsuccessful. Eventually, the

In 1934, at least 38 countries world-wide were borrowing and lending materials internationally. As a result of the extensive international exchange of books, in 1935 IFLA was asked to promulgate regulations, which they did in 1936.⁴⁷

Needless to say, World War II destroyed the international practice of interlibrary loan, and it was not until 1947 that IFLA began to discuss the re-initiation of interlibrary lending. Many countries, however, lacked union catalogs, which made lending difficult. Finally, in 1954, new international rules were established which led to a rapid increase in international borrowing and lending. Even Eastern European countries under the "Iron Curtain" were admitted into the system.⁴⁸

The United States, however, was slow to resume international lending. Although some individual U.S. libraries reluctantly began to loan materials to Europe after the war, it was not until 1959, following the promulgation of *International Interlibrary Loan Procedure for United States Libraries* by ALA, that the majority of U.S. libraries willingly resumed lending their materials across the Atlantic.⁴⁹

The second half of the 20th c. witnessed an astronomical increase in the international exchange of library materials, consistent with rapid advances in technology, population, and an increased emphasis on the importance and accessibility of education.

Between 1967 and 1970, requests for materials of the British increased from 9,700 to 54,300 from 64 countries. In 1971, the creation of overseas photocopy service contributed to the formation of the British Library Lending Division of the National Lending Library for Science and Technology (NLLST) in 1973. In 1974, the NLLST received requests from abroad for 210,000 items. By 1980, the NLLST was receiving requests numbering over 500,000 annually from foreign libraries.⁵⁰

Department of Printed Books became Great Britain's national library. Gilmer, *supra* note 1, at 1.

⁴⁷ Gilmer, *supra* note 1, at 6.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 7.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ Brian Kefford, *International Interlibrary Lending: A Review of the Literature* 17-21 (1982).

Other European countries were not so productive or active. Spain, for example, had an official lending office in its Biblioteca Nacional. However, in 1972, it processed only 204 incoming requests for materials, and it made only 608 requests to borrow materials from international libraries. Portugal still had not formalized its interlibrary loan program by the early 1970s. The numbers in Italy were quite low as well: 1,750 requests from foreign countries to borrow materials from the Consiglio Nazionale, of which about 550 were satisfied and only 375 requests sent abroad.⁵¹ However, by 1978, Italy satisfied as many as 30,000 requests for materials.⁵²

In 1975, IFLA created an International Lending office to assist less self-sufficient libraries in borrowing materials.⁵³ In 1978, IFLA revised its 1954 Rules with the promulgation of *International Lending: Principles and Guidelines for Procedure*; there was a major revision in 1987. "While they [the rules] have no mandatory force, and while every country must determine the ways in which it conducts interlending, the guidelines are strongly urged on individual countries and libraries as a basis for the conduct of international lending."⁵⁴ The Guidelines were updated once again in 2006 and provide recommendations to libraries.⁵⁵ Many libraries around the world consider and follow IFLA's recommendations, including the American Library Association:

3.2 Interlibrary loan transactions with libraries outside of the United States are governed by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' *International Lending: Principles and Guidelines for Procedure*.⁵⁶

IV. Conclusion

Peirese would be thrilled to see the amount of borrowing and lending in today's world. Twenty-first century librarians and library patrons think of

⁵¹ *Id.* at 2-3.

⁵² *Id.* at 5.

⁵³ *Id.* at 28.

⁵⁴ IFLANET, Section on Document Delivery and Interlending, Sec.1, Para. 2, <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s15/pubs/pguide.htm> (last visited Oct. 20, 2004).

⁵⁵ IFLANET, IFLA Guidelines for Best Practices for Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery, <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/papers/073-Stein-en.pdf>.7 (last visited August 3, 2007).

⁵⁶ American Library Association, Interlibrary loan code for the United States (2001), <http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaprotools/referenceguide/interlibrary.htm> (last visited Aug. 3, 2007).

international interlibrary loan as a viable, economical, and natural option. Internet technology, library consortia and organizations (especially OCLC and IFLA), and reliable, cost-efficient couriers and postal services have made international lending quick and dependable. In fact, on a daily basis one can observe articles and information being exchanged via informal international electronic *listservs* as well as through formalized lending procedures. The once-held notion that one must wait months or years (or possibly forever and never) to receive a book or document that can only be found half-way around the world is today inconceivable. In the not-to-distant future, projects such as Microsoft Live Search Books and Google Book Search and print-on-demand possibilities promise to bring books from far away lands and otherwise inaccessible libraries to people even more quickly, without the need for patrons to undertake the formal lending procedure at their own libraries.

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